

Gimbels Advertising Claims Prove False

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in its recent "Birthday Sales," celebrating the sixth anniversary of the store's establishment in New York. The event has run true to Gimbels' "sales" form. It has been a series of misrepresentations, mainly based upon claims of spurious value for the goods sold. Gimbels heralded it to this effect:

"\$6,000,000 stocks of fine, new merchandise, bought in advance at prices which in many cases are lower than present wholesale prices, will be placed on sale during October."

With singular appropriateness, the hopeful birthday shopper was greeted, on entering the sale on the Thirty-second Street side, by a display of "Iceland fox." There they lay, white, graceful and shining, under a "birthday" placard specifying attractive prices for scarfs. Have you ever seen an Iceland fox? It is a curious animal with strange and disconcerting habits. It has an artificial face, a hand-made tail, and hooks instead of claws, wherewith it tears open the pockets of the guileless and draws forth their money. In the wild state it wears horns, contrary to the usual vulpine habit, and says "Baa!" which is not included in the vocal register of the fox from less remote localities. Scientists aver that its coat is curly and its habitat Thibet; and a great poet has written of it in deathless words:

"Mary had an Iceland fox
Its fleece was white as snow."

That is to say, the Iceland fox (Gimbel) is Mary's little lamb, under an alias. In other words, it's a howling, bleating, baa-ing fake!

But when I asked the sales girl, "Is this real fox?" she, being inspired by the Gimbel birthday spirit, said:

"Oh, yes."

"It's regular white fox, is it?" I persisted.

"Well—er—no. It isn't genuine Arctic fox. It couldn't be at the price. It's what they call Iceland fox."

"But it came from a real fox? It's fox fur?"

"Oh, certainly."

So it was bought for \$4.45. The price is not excessive if one were buying it for what it really is, Thibet lamb; neither is it particularly cheap. But when one buys fox one expects a straight fur which will stay straight. A fox whose hair curls up every time it rains would be regarded with suspicion by his fellows, whether in Iceland or Iowa. My \$4.45 specimen, the first time it got wet, reverted to type and proceeded to coil up on itself like a collection of peeved rattlesnakes. If it doesn't straighten out maybe I can sell it back to Gimbels as false whiskers for a Santa Claus in case they follow up their birthday celebration with a Christmas party.

Iceland fox typifies the "value" offerings of the Gimbel Birthday Sales and former sales. It is pretending to be what it is not. That is what is wrong with the Gimbel values. They are pretending to be something which they are not. They curl up when put to the water test. The trail of the Iceland fox is over the store.

Take, for example, the opening bargain offer in men's clothes, a special sale of suits at \$14.75; "new \$22.50 and \$27.50 fall and winter suits." The advertisements continue:

"Ordinarily you would pay \$22.50 to \$27.50 for these suits."

It may be true, for the birth rate is still 1 per minute in the class that does that sort of thing and believes this sort of thing from the Gimbel advertising:

"\$22.50 to \$27.50 Values. Standard Gimbel Clothes."

The suits are smart, new models, the pick of the best clothes made in America, and must not be confused with average clothes selling around their present prices. . . . We unreservedly pronounce this the best offer Gimbels has made the present year."

Possibly, though I should shrink from so damnable a confession as the final statement, if I were interested in Gimbels. The Tribune appraisers, hard, literal-minded men, who lack the birthday spirit and enthusiasm, take quite another view of the matter. One estimates that the suit which The Tribune shoppers bought for \$14.75 as a \$25 value (it carried the relics of a tag with the remains of a \$25 price mark on it) should sell at \$12.50 retail. "This is the worst made suit you ever sent me for appraisal," says he, in his cold, brutal way. The other thinks that it might go on sale at \$13.50, but that should be a top price. When \$25 was mentioned as the value, they ceased to appraise and began to laugh.

Men's hats advertised as "Reg. \$3 and more" for \$1.85 were also strictly in the birthday spirit of the sale. Most of them appeared to be sample hats, and many of them were still ornamented with the wholesalers' price marks. The salesman volunteered the information for what it was worth (which was nothing) that the lowest priced hat in the lot carried a wholesale price of \$24.00 per dozen. This would mean \$3.00 retail, as the advertisement stated. Unfortunately, the salesman did not look into his hat before talking through it. The Tribune purchasers did; they looked into two of them, found the wholesale price tags still there, and bought. One hat bears the price of a \$16.50 wholesale line, the other a \$17.00 per dozen label. Therefore the headgear should normally retail at \$2.00 or \$2.25 at most. The hats would thus appear to be derived from the Iceland or Gimbel fox.

Values in women's wear came from the same part of the map. For example:

"A Thousand Silk Dresses at \$9.75.
Street and Afternoon Dresses That, Bought
in the Regular Way, Would Sell at
\$15 to \$19.75."

For "bought in the regular way" substitute "bought on the Iceland method" and the statement would be so unimpeachable that it would probably spoil the birthday party. The Tribune shoppers paid \$9.75 for one of these birthday presents from Messrs. Gimbel. If, as the advertisement stated, there were "40 Styles to Choose From, the Season's Newest and Best," our purchase must have been numbered 41-Z. It was far from being the "season's Newest" and it could scarcely be ranked among the season's best, being wrinkled and much soiled. The workmanship is poor and the trimmings cheap. After looking it over the appraising expert became curious.

"What did you pay for it? Six dollars? No? Seven? More than seven. What! Nine seventy-five? For this? Oh, that's no value for the money."

"The value," explained the purchaser, "is somewhere from \$15 to \$19.75."

"Who says so?"

"The advertisement."

"Well," observed the appraiser, philosophically, "lying isn't a state's prison offence."

The Iceland fox trail next led to the linen department, where Madeira, embroidered tea napkins were placarded:

"Regularly \$7.50 a Doz. Price \$5.75."

The clerk backed it up. They were the regular \$7.50 goods, she said. We bought a dozen. Then we went to Altman's, where there was no birthday or anniversary or other special sale on in linens, and bought almost the same thing for \$5.25. Almost, but not quite. The Altman tea napkin is the standard size: 14 inches. The Gimbel one is 13 inches. The embroidery on the Altman specimen is better than on the Gimbel, and, taken altogether, there is a distinct superiority in favor of the former. To claim a \$7.50 value for an article when a superior in the same line can be obtained for \$5.25 is another typical effort of the Gimbels Icelandic imagination. As for the actual selling price, \$5.75, the Gimbels make a little extra profit on that—for their birthday, perhaps.

Caution was the characteristic of the salesman at the blanket counter. He declined to commit himself as to the value of the All-Wool White Blankets "\$8.75 pr. Regularly \$12.00," according to the advertisement, even when pressed. The line had never been sold by them for \$12.00, he stated, because it was new stock. But he was quite sure that it was the best blanket obtainable at the sales price, \$8.75. Possibly. That is not the question to which The Tribune purchasers sought the answer. What they wanted to know was whether the \$12 value claim had a foxy or Icelandic smell. It had. At Wanamaker's the purchasers found blankets at \$10.50 which were markedly superior and some at \$8.50 which compared favorably with the "Regularly \$12" Gimbel blanket offered at \$8.75. As for the Gimbel comforters, "Regularly \$7.00," offered at \$6, that is a staple line. It is on sale practically everywhere. But nowhere have The Tribune buyers found it priced as high as \$7. Precisely the same article has been bought since at Macy's for \$5.19. And this is not a "special," "reduced" or "birthday" price. It is a regular price. Gimbels comforter at \$6.00 is therefore no startling bargain, except as stuffed with Icelandic fox valuation.

List now to the Icelandic saga on the subject of furniture:

"Stickley Craftsman

Furniture at Half Price.

"Two carloads more of the famous Gustav Stickley Craftsman Furniture have just arrived from Syracuse, N. Y., and will be sold at half price. . . . We urge an early visit to avoid disappointment."

Gimbels furniture mathematics are of the same species as the clothing figures and can hardly be regarded as the legitimate offspring of old George W. Arithmetic. A chair marked originally as \$39.00 was reduced to \$23.50. Take that home and try it on your blackboard and if you can make a half price out of it The Bureau of Investigations will give you the chair. It is not precisely 50% off by any process of multiplication, division, fractions or the binomial theorem familiar to this office. One exhibit, however, we now possess where the Gimbel figures were correct, whatever one may think of the Gimbel morals. This is a china closet of a pattern now discontinued but formerly catalogued by Gustav Stickley at \$54 retail. Gimbels exhibited it in the "half price" Stickley sale, ticketed at \$30.00. Now it might appear to a cavilling mind that \$30 is not 50% of \$54. Well, Gimbels know that just as well as anybody else. So they took the \$54 china cabinet and made it \$60, and then halved the \$60, which made \$30, and sold it to The Tribune shoppers at that price. Mathematically beyond criticism! First you run the price up; then you run the price down—the elevator system. Watch your step when you take the Gimbel price elevator.

"Figures," as the late Prof. Euclid observed, addressing the multitude from the railing of the Pons Asinorum, "never lie; but figures do."

The weakness of the Gimbel figurers is that their team work in mendacity is considerably inferior to that of Ananias & Sapphira, who used to sell Iceland foxes on the Broadway of early times. For instance, in the recent sale of velour portieres the mathematical expert who wrote the Gimbel newspaper advertisement offers \$25 value for \$18.75, and is backed up by the skilled accountant who engorges the placards over the counter: "Value \$25 per pair; Sale Price \$18.75." But the value demonstrator who handles the sales tags has a different opinion and expresses it large and bold. "Value \$24," is his opinion; and so far as The Tribune purchasers could ascertain he had attached it to every exhibit on the \$25-value tables. What, then, is the actual value of the portieres sold for \$18.75; is it \$25 or \$24? If any bright pupil in the Gimbel school of mathematics thinks he can tell, he'd better think again. It's neither. Perhaps, then, it is \$18.75, the price paid for The Tribune's pair. Perhaps, also, not. For at Macy's, just up the street, the investigators purchased velour portieres of exactly the same shades for \$16.89, without any foxy claims of value. The only difference was that the Macy hangings were of a little better material, and more of it; one foot more, to be exact.

Failing to "prove up" the Gimbel mathematics with ordinary implements, the investigators tried out a Gimbel fountain pen, at the usual birthday bargain. Like the Gimbel valuations, the pen was self-filling, and carried a valuation of its own. It was a Salz Bros. No. 4 "short-bodied" pen, and the Gimbelized or birthday specifications were "Fountain Pen, \$1; sold regularly for \$2.50." Well, possibly, in Nome, Alaska, or on the Verdun front, where weapons of peace are rare and high priced. But nearer at home, on 23d Street, Ahern & Randall are offering exactly the same pen, without value claims, at \$1. Furthermore, it was displayed on the standard sales card for this article, under the legend "The Pen That Made the Dollar Useful." Gimbels ought to adapt that slogan and sell the pen under the revised form, "The Pen That Made the Dollar Foolish." Any pen which makes a dollar represent \$2.50 value makes it foolish. At a guess, Gimbels is employing that kind for a great deal of its advertisement writing.

The interesting feature of the men's wear sales in Gimbels is that some new and curious feat of the advertising imagination is likely to crop up there at any time. It cropped up on Monday in the form of "Men's All-Wool Sweaters, \$4.95 and \$6.45; Values, \$6.50 to \$10.50." Still pursuing the phantom Hope through the fog of Gimbel promises, the purchasers went to the fourth floor and asked for a \$10.50 sweater. The salesman looked uncomfortable.

"We haven't any \$10.50 values," he said.

A copy of the offer was shown to him. "Yes," he admitted, "that's the way the ad reads, I know. But we haven't got any. Here's the best we have. It's a \$9.00 value."

At an expense of \$6.45 The Tribune acquired that \$9.00 substitute for a \$10.50 value. It was a "Pennsylvania Knit-Coat," light gray in color. At H. Lowenthal's, on Third Avenue, another Pennsylvania Knit-Coat of the same weave, but slightly darker color, was found. It was also better finished than the Gimbel article; but was otherwise identical. Was the price (or value) \$9.00? It was not \$9.00. Nor was it \$8.00 nor \$7.00 nor \$6.45—the Gimbel reduced birthday price. It was \$5.95, at which price Mr. Lowenthal made his legitimate profit and was content.

Two purchases from the "Bargain Subway Offerings" in women's and misses' suits were next acquired. The sale was advertised as consisting of "\$19.75 to \$29.75 Suits for Only \$15." Nothing was specified as to the age of the garments. Interrogated on this point, the saleswoman said that she did not know whether the first suit selected was a new model or not.

"I'll ask the head of stock," she said.

The head of stock being summoned, averred that the suit was this season's new goods and was really worth \$18.50, but had been marked down. Just where, between \$19.75 and \$29.75, the values claimed in the advertisement, \$18.50 comes in, I have been unable to discover. More Gimbel mathematics. The second suit was bought on the strength of the value-specifying placard and the statement in the advertisement: "Remarkable enthusiasm was caused by our recent sale of suits at this same price, and this second lot should do even more."

Neither of the suits caused any remarkable enthusiasm in the unresponsive breasts of The Tribune appraisers. The first is described as a last spring's regular \$15 model, suitable to small-town trade now. The second is appraised "among the poorest of the regular \$15 models on the market." Except as trimmed with imaginative Iceland fox by the Gimbel advertising geniuses, neither could possibly justify a \$19.75 or \$29.75 character.

Shortly before the birthday party, and perhaps as a sort of preparation for that festive event, Gimbels came out with a splurge in the clothing department—one of the least truthful in the organization—to this effect:

"One \$7.50 Suit for \$7.50—Two \$7.50 Suits for \$8.50," following it up with a "blurb" of a familiar and playful type:

"This Gimbel mathematics is better than anything you ever learned at school."

Doubtless this is mathematics as taught in Iceland. It isn't taught that way in Harlem, and in Harlem is the store of Koch & Co., which is interested in selling boys' suits and is also interested in figures. The Harlem concern investigated, purchased a suit, compared it with their own goods and announced in an advertisement that the "Herald Square section" store's suit (not giving the name of the store) offered as a \$7.50 value, was about the same as a suit sold at Koch's for \$4.00. The Bureau of Investigations has in its possession one of these "\$7.50" suits bought at Gimbels and one of the \$4.00 suits bought at Koch's. The weight of expert opinion declares the Koch suit to be actually better value for the money than the marked down clothing embellished and Gimbelled with a \$7.50 value.

Two weeks after the sale, ten days after the Koch charge, and a few days after Gimbels were informed that their advertising was no longer acceptable to The Tribune, the store published elsewhere an advertisement appealing to all purchasers of the "two-for-\$8.50" suits to return them and have their money refunded. The explanation of the suits is interesting:

"Due to a mistake in our Stock rooms, a quantity of Suits which our Buyer had rejected as not being up to GIMBEL STANDARD were inadvertently sent down and included in the Sale instead of being returned to the manufacturer."

As to the credibility of this statement, I have no comment to offer. It is fair to remark, however, that the claims of value, wherein the essential deception lay, were not more excessive than in various other Gimbel offerings not as yet made the subjects of Gimbel apologies in print.

Embodied in the Gimbel excusatory advertisement is the Gimbel guarantee, copied from the sales slip which goes out with every purchase:

In receiving the goods purchased on this sales slip, please remember that we are not satisfied with any transaction that is unsatisfactory to a customer, and that in cases of dissatisfaction we refund the money paid as cheerfully as we took it.

The only exceptions made to this rule are those that are enforced by reasonable precautions for our own protection and the safety of the next customer.

Gimbel Brothers, New York.

An excellent guarantee. No store could be expected to maintain a better one. Justice to Gimbels compels the statement that, so far as The Tribune's investigations go, money is refunded in strict accord with the letter and spirit of the promise. But—and this is a vitally important but—restitution for the offence of selling misrepresented goods does not and cannot justify a repetition of the same offence. True, Smith, if he is tricked by Gimbels' faked-up values, can come in and get his money back. How does that help Jones, who is fooled the next day by another fake advertisement of Gimbel make? Or, if Jones also recovers, there is Robinson, whose money, spent for "values" that do not exist, helps to keep the Gimbel mechanism going in a sort of endless chain of Iceland foxes, each chasing the tail of a little bleater just in front of him!

Now, were this recent Birthday Sale Gimbels' first offence in broad-gauge misrepresentation, it might be charitably regarded as carelessness. The Tribune Bureau of Investigations neither investigates, judges nor condemns hastily. Isolated error does not bring a merchant into the light of publicity through these columns. Not even isolated breach of trust toward the buying public does. There must be evidence of a policy so unreliable or so inimical to the public interest that The Tribune cannot justly continue to expose its readers to it before an advertiser is ousted from the paper and his procedure made the text of a Tribune exposure. Such evidence against Gimbels reaches back over months, displaying itself sporadically, but especially in connection with "special sales."

The Gimbel sale of Simpson-Crawford stock in the summer of 1915 is represented in the Bureau of Investigations' museum by widely exaggerated advertising claims, by damaged goods (some so badly damaged as to be unfit for sale on any honest representation) sold as perfect, and by absurdly high prices represented as bargains. When the result of this investigation was set before Gimbels the store pleaded innocence of any evil intent, confessed that too great latitude had been allowed to the advertising manager, and found a new man for that position.

In January, 1916, a "special sale" of leather goods purporting to be the stock of the Langfeld Co. was extensively advertised at bargain rates. Much of the stock was genuine Langfeld goods, and this was sold at low rates. But mingled with it was a percentage of old, shopworn merchandise which had no more connection with Langfeld than Thibetan horns have with a genuine fox. The special sale was used as a vehicle to carry off these "stickers" at exaggerated prices. Out of a number of purchases made in one part of the sale by Tribune purchasers, under the Langfeld placard, several were not Langfeld goods. Here again Gimbels acknowledged the facts, but asserted that due allowance for human error would cover the instances. Changes in the internal management of the store which promised improvement were made, and again The Tribune accepted the Gimbel assurances of good faith.

But the faith of Gimbels is good to exactly the extent that a real fox—in Iceland or elsewhere—wears fleece and says "Baa!" Sporadic evidence kept coming in, sometimes in complaints from

Tribune readers, more often from the constant lookout maintained by the Bureau of Investigations, of misrepresentations and false claims; old styles in furs sold as new; ancient goods of other makes "rung in" on special sales as the old goods were impinged upon the Langfeld sale; fur sold under false representation as to its nature; bargains and reductions offered in various lines at prices actually above those charged in neighboring stores for the same goods, until it became only a question of time when The Tribune could no longer with justice to itself, its readers, and its honest and fair-dealing advertisers thus subjected to the undermining competition of falsity, continue the Gimbel advertising. Two considerations operated to postpone radical action. First, readers who might be misled by the Gimbel claims were fully protected by The Tribune's money-back guarantee; added to which, the store always proved itself most prompt and effective in remedying complaints and living up to its refund offer. Second: occasional evidence from the internal affairs of the store that a certain element in the management, believed to be responsible for the old-time untrustworthy policy, was being slowly eliminated.

Then, a short time ago, there was offered to The Tribune a large "blanket" advertisement of a special furniture sale at Gimbels, the heading of which was so glaringly false that it was refused. Gimbels altered it. But Gimbels did not alter itself. The "Birthday Sale" was announced, the Koch exposure of the fake clothing advertisement followed. The uttermost limits of charity had been reached. Gimbel Brothers were notified that their advertising was no longer acceptable to this paper.

Here, as exemplifying the dealings of The Tribune with great stores, there may appropriately be recounted a bit of unwritten local merchandising history, without the name of the store, since to give it would seriously damage a concern now doing a strictly straight business. It furnishes an instructive parallel to the Gimbel episode.

Complaints were received by the Bureau of Investigations concerning the advertising of an establishment which I will call the Inter-City Stores. We investigated. Conditions proved to be bad—very bad. The advertising was grossly false; the goods were, in several instances, absolutely unfit for sale. Exposure would have made interesting reading, because the store was connected with an enormous concern of international reputation. There were no relations of any kind between the store or the parent concern and The Tribune, such as existed in the case of Gimbels. Neither of them was a Tribune advertiser, nor was there any prospect that they ever would advertise in The Tribune. Assuming that this would have weight, as has been charged (it wouldn't), and assuming another accusation made against this paper, that it would "slaughter" any business to "make a Tribune holiday," here was the ideal opportunity.

The management back of the Inter-City Stores was advised that they were being investigated. They came to The Bureau of Investigations. Like Gimbels, they felt that they should be heard on the evidence. After seeing the evidence they felt different.

"No defence," said the manager when, for the first time he was confronted with the ruff-raff and junk in The Tribune collection. "Nothing to say, except that we didn't know. And that's no defence. We ought to have known. You've got the goods. We'll take our medicine."

The Tribune doesn't give that kind of medicine to that kind of subject. One point in the manager's brief statement was vital: "We didn't know." Further investigation showed that to be probably true. My article dealing with the "Inter-City Stores" was held. The "stores" closed for a clean-up; not a physical clean-up of stock alone, but an ethical clean-up of standards; perhaps the first instance of the sort in mercantile history. When they opened, it was on a profoundly different basis. As keenly as we had been watching Gimbels—perhaps even more keenly—The Bureau of Investigations has kept its staff busy with that store since. We haven't even caught them in error. They are doing an absolutely straight, honorable business and doing more of it than when they were crooked. My article exposing them slumbers deeply in a remote drawer. There is no prospect that it will ever awake. I hope it won't.

Now for the parallel. The Inter-City Stores were "caught with the goods." They had their chance. They took it and wiped out the evil record. Their chance was honesty. To-day they are safe from The Tribune—and The Tribune is glad of it. Gimbel Brothers were caught with the goods. They had their chance. They seemed to take it. Again they fell into the evil way of the liar in print. Still they professed good intentions. They wanted another chance. They got that and reformed for a time. But—there is no known method of selling Iceland fox honestly. Gimbels wish to sell Iceland fox. They have sold it and continued to sell it under guise of bargains in suits, in dresses, in hats, in china, in linen, in bedding, in whatever might lend itself to that most temporary and perilous of all distortions, fake claims or value. And not they must reckon up the profit to their pocket as against the loss to their good repute.

It is a hard problem and an ugly one. Gimbel mathematics will not solve it. Gimbel mathematics will not solve anything in the long run, because the facts refute it. And now the store of Gimbel Brothers is face to face with the facts. It is the facts and not The Tribune which condemn Gimbels. The Tribune is but the blackboard upon which the facts are written. It has been used once too often for the setting forth of Gimbel fiction. The truth about that store is a debt, overdue, to its readers.

One fact may fittingly be presented for the consideration of the Gimbels. It is a fact the recognition of which is essential to the decent, honorable conduct of any merchandising business. It is this:

Advertising is the voice of the store.

No store can endure whose voice utters less than the truth.

RIDER'S WIFE NAMES DANCER

Henry, King Alfonso's Jockey, Fails to Defend Divorce Suit
Milton Henry, American jockey, now riding for King Alfonso of Spain, did not appear in the Supreme Court yesterday to defend the suit for divorce brought by Mrs. Helen Henry. Justice Delehanty reserved decision.

A postcard was put in evidence by Mrs. Henry, which showed her husband in company with a young woman, taken at a French watering resort. Miss Leonie Charters, a friend of the plaintiff, testified that the young woman on the postcard was Jeanne Francois, a dancer.

Henry came to this country several months ago to effect a reconciliation with his wife, with whom he lived at Chantilly, France, and was served with the papers in the divorce suit.

FAMILY IN NEED OF HELP

Man and Wife Both Stricken by Sickness
Sickness and poverty have reduced the Bowman family in Brooklyn to pitiable circumstances. Mr. Bowman

worked hard to support his wife and four children until illness rendered him unable to stand on his feet for any length of time. He now is incapable of working. His wife took up the burden of family support where her husband left off, but hard work and worry finally broke her down, and she has developed tuberculosis.

Road Builders to Meet

The annual meeting of the American Road Builders' Association will be held at the Automobile Club of America, 30 West Fifty-fourth Street, Friday afternoon, November 3, when there will be an election of officers. In the evening the annual dinner will be held in the ballroom of the club.